

What Makes You a Mentor?



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Your own life experiences in learning and working with others qualify you to be a mentor. The best mentors are people whose own enthusiasm for their work and recreation is so contagious that they inspire others just by doing what they enjoy most. Sharing your own interests with a young person is the beginning of mentoring.

However, the object of mentoring is to encourage the total growth of a younger, less experienced person whose needs and interests are the mentor's primary consideration. What you do and how you do it will depend on your mentee.

The following are characteristics of a mentor:

Role Model:

- Provides a model for civil and appropriate behavior and attitudes.
- A person whom the youth admires or wants to be like.
- Has qualities/values that the youth desires for self.
- Expands the youth's perspective and definition of adulthood.



Teacher:

- Helps youth to acquire knowledge, information, or skills.
- Shows youth how to do things.
- Participates with youth in learning new things.



Companion:

- Enjoys doing things with youth.
- Shares interests and experiences with youth.
- Spends time talking with youth.



Support:

- Boosts youth's self-esteem.
- Conveys warm caring about youth as a person.
- Gives support to youth's efforts.
- Listens to youth's ideas and concerns.
- Expresses belief in youth's abilities

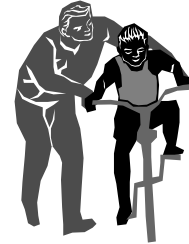


Resource:

- Provides opportunities to try new things.
- Introduces youth to new people, places, interests, or ideas.
- Encourages youth to approach other people as resources.
- Suggests new sources of information.

**Challenges:**

- Encourages youth to set goals and plan how to reach them.
- Pushes youth to do well and try things on his/her own.
- Gives constructive criticism.
- Engages youth in increasingly complex activities.

**A Mentor Encourages**

Mentors can help the mentee build self-confidence, self-esteem and cultural pride to last a lifetime by focusing on the talents, assets and strengths of the mentee.

A Mentor Builds on the Positive

Whenever possible, approach the issues and problems addressed in the activities in a positive light, building on related strengths that your mentee may have demonstrated. For example, if reading is a problem, start by reading things in which your mentee is interested and expand from there.

You can be the one to help your mentee make the connection between his/her actions of today and his/her dreams and goals of tomorrow. For example, if your mentee dreams of graduating from high school with his/her classmates, be sure to point out how skipping school today will affect his/her chances of completing school on schedule, if at all. Bring in examples of struggles that are real to your mentee - a hero or local community leader. Be as concrete and relevant as possible.

A Mentor Turns Everything Into A Learning Experience

Keep an eye out for learning opportunities and "teachable" moments." If your mentee expresses an interest in someone or something, no matter how slight, take advantage of the situation and help him/her develop the interest further - you never know where this might lead. Over time, she/he may learn to be aware of and creative with her own potential. For example, if he/she mentions or expresses an interest in a local politician, take him/her to hear the politician speak. From there, you can begin to think of other ways to transform a casual interest into other learning experiences using your time, energy and perhaps connections.